UNITED
NATIONS

S

Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1996/1063
20 December 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

FURTHER REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE SITUATION IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION OF AFRICA

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted in pursuance of paragraph 12 of resolution 1080 (1996) and of my letter of 12 December 1996 (S/1996/1036) with which I transmitted to the Security Council the report I had received earlier that day from Mr. Raymond Chrétien following his mission to the Great Lakes region as my Special Envoy. Its purpose is to update the Council on developments in that region since my report of 29 November 1996 (S/1996/993) and to inform the Council of the action which, after consultation with the Secretary-General elect, I propose to take in response to my Special Envoy's recommendations.

2. In examining my Special Envoy's report, I have been conscious that, while the humanitarian crisis may have eased somewhat, enormous challenges remain. Little progress has been made in easing international tensions within the region. Internal conflicts persist. The humanitarian crisis created by the various conflicts is itself far from being resolved. With the return to Rwanda of an estimated 560,000 refugees from eastern Zaire and more than 235,000 from the United Republic of Tanzania since 1 December, urgent attention must now be devoted to the social, economic and political integration of these returnees. So far they are reported to have been well received by the people of Rwanda and by the Rwandan Government. Meanwhile, in Zaire, the large number of Rwandan and Burundian refugees who moved further west into that country and the estimated 250,000 internally displaced persons of Zairian nationality, as well as some 500,000 other Zairians affected by the conflict, require immediate humanitarian assistance. United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have only limited access to these people. Another pressing concern is the future of the personnel of the former Rwandese Armed Forces (FAR) and the extremist militias (Interahamwe) connected with them, as well as their families and the bona fide refugees they may be keeping as hostages.

II. DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 26 NOVEMBER 1996

96-37219 (E) 201296

3. In Rwanda, tens of thousands of persons have been suddenly forced to find new housing, as they vacate houses owned by the returning refugees. No major conflict related to property issues has so far been reported, but the shortage of housing remains a potential flashpoint. Given the existence of other vulnerable groups such as genocide survivors and old-caseload returnees who fled the country in 1959, it is imperative that the international community provide vigorous support to the efforts of the Government of Rwanda to handle the large-scale influx and take urgent steps to improve the judicial system. As I have already indicated to the Council (S/1996/993, para. 23), an increase in the United Nations Human Rights Field Operation is also imperative.

4. As regards the situation in Zaire, a recent development was the return, on 17 December 1996, of President Mobutu. On 18 December, he signed a decree appointing General Mahele as Chief of Staff of the Zairian Army. The following day he met Zaire's political leaders to discuss the situation in the eastern part of the country and the need to establish a crisis Government.

5. Zaire continues to consider itself the victim of aggression on the part of Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda whose regular armies, it alleges, have violated its territorial integrity and its recognized international borders. Rwanda and Burundi, for their part, deny Zaire's allegations and do not consider themselves at war with that country. As regards Uganda, the Zairian Government, in a communiqué to myself and the members of the Security Council dated 1 December 1996 (S/1996/994, annex), has accused Uganda of introducing troops armed with tanks and armoured vehicles into Zairian territory in support of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) and of engaging the Zairian armed forces in combat near the town of Beni close to the border between the two countries. The Government of Uganda has categorically refuted these allegations and, in a communiqué to the Council dated 9 December 1996 (S/1996/1038, annex), stated that the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) have at no time crossed the border into Zairian territory and that, on the contrary, Uganda had been invaded on 13 November 1996 by forces originating from inside Zairian territory. According to the Ugandan Government, these forces occupied towns within Uganda and were then repulsed by UPDF which, in hot pursuit, forced them to retreat into Zaire.

6. The United Nations, which has no military observers in the region, is not in a position to verify independently any of these allegations or counter-allegations. For the same reason, I am not in a position to describe in any detail developments in the military situation in eastern Zaire since the Banyamulenge seized a large tract of territory in North Kivu and South Kivu in October and November of this year.

7. On 10 December 1996, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights opened a human rights office in Kinshasa. Two experts will follow the human rights situation in the country and advise the authorities on matters relating to the promotion and protection of human rights.

8. In Burundi, hostilities between the Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie (CNDD) and the army continue, particularly in the north of the country, and have already led to large-scale displacement, including the flight of Hutu refugees into the United Republic of Tanzania. According to the Office

of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 78,000 Burundian refugees are now in camps in the United Republic, with negative consequences for the already strained relations between the two neighbours. There are approximately half a million internally displaced persons in Burundi, and only a modest level of humanitarian assistance is being provided to them. In these difficult circumstances, the humanitarian agencies have asked the Regional Sanctions Coordination Committee in Nairobi for exemptions needed to ensure the least possible hindrance to their work by the regional sanctions imposed on Burundi since 31 July 1996.

9. On the diplomatic front, the countries of the region have intensified their efforts to address the complex of problems confronting them, as demonstrated by the series of summits recently held at Brazzaville, Ouagadougou and Nairobi. However, none of these summits has been attended by leaders of all the States concerned and relations within the region and, to an increasing extent, between regions remain strained.

III. THE MULTINATIONAL FORCE

10. On 16 December 1996, I transmitted to the Security Council a letter dated 13 December from the Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations (S/1996/1025, annex) which stated that the Government of Canada had concluded that, with the return to Rwanda of the majority of refugees, the dispersal of the remaining number over large areas of eastern Zaire and the growing access of international humanitarian agencies to the remaining refugees, displaced persons and civilians at risk, the multinational force at the current authorized force level would be of very little utility. Canada would therefore withdraw its personnel from the Great Lakes region by 31 December 1996 and recommended that the Security Council terminate the mandate of the force, with effect from the same date.

11. In my report of 29 November 1996 (S/1996/993, para. 41), I observed that, as of that date, the nature, strength, composition, mandate and modus operandi of the multinational force envisaged under resolutions 1078 (1996) and 1080 (1996) were still under consideration by the Member States concerned, and that as long as no final decision had been taken on all those matters, it would not be possible to present to the Security Council a detailed concept of operations for the proposed follow-on operation. Those considerations apply with still greater force now that the Canadian Government has taken the decisions described in the letter of its Permanent Representative referred to above. Under the circumstances, therefore, I am not in a position to recommend to the Council the establishment of a United Nations operation to follow on from the multinational force.

IV. FUTURE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

12. It is evident from the present summary of the last few weeks' developments that major problems persist in the Great Lakes region, notwithstanding the welcome repatriation of a large part of the Rwandan refugees who were previously

in the United Republic of Tanzania and Zaire. These problems include: intermittent hostilities across Zaire's borders with its eastern neighbours; internal conflict within Zaire; the future of the ex-FAR, the Interahamwe and their families who remain in Zaire, as well as in the United Republic; the unresolved conflict in Burundi; the prodigious demands made upon the Government of Rwanda by the massive return of refugees; and the continuing needs of hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons who remain scattered in the region, particularly in Zaire.

13. These problems must continue to command the attention of the international community. The United Nations system is already devoting a considerable effort to them, especially in the humanitarian and developmental fields. Since November, a Regional Humanitarian Coordinator has had overall responsibility for the coordination of United Nations humanitarian work in the region. His main task is to ensure the coherence of the policies of all humanitarian partners there, to monitor the overall implementation of the programme in the region and to ensure consolidated inter-agency efforts to mobilize resources. A United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Flash Appeal was launched for the period from 1 November 1996 to 31 January 1997, with total requirements amounting to US$ 259 million. As of 18 December 1996, $112 million, amounting to 43 per cent of the total, had been contributed by the international community. Preparations are under way for a full-fledged Consolidated Appeal to meet humanitarian requirements for the remainder of 1997.

14. The United Nations is also involved in political activities, at the request of the Governments concerned, notably through the efforts of the various Special Envoys whom I have sent to the region in recent months, through the good offices of my Special Representative in Burundi, through the Human Rights Field Operations in Burundi and in Rwanda and the new office of the United Nations Human Rights Centre in Zaire, and through the electoral assistance mission in Zaire, which has now been in operation for nearly three months and which has been welcomed by the Government of Zaire and is receiving important support from that Government and financial assistance from interested Member States.

15. In these circumstances, I believe that there is a case for strengthening the capacity of the United Nations to perform three functions: the provision of good offices to those involved in the various conflicts in the region; the mobilization of international interest in, and support for, an integrated effort to address the region's manifold problems; and coordination of the work of the United Nations system as a whole. Such a strengthening of the political role of the United Nations would, of course, need to be undertaken in close consultation with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and with the agreement of the Governments concerned.

16. I am inclined to think that such a role would require the presence in the region of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General who, as Mr. Chrétien has emphasized, would need to be endowed with adequate staff and logistic support, especially in the aviation and telecommunications fields. This would be option (a) in paragraph 33 of Mr. Chrétien's report (S/1996/1036, annex).

17. However, I believe that, given the fluid situation which persists in the region, it would be somewhat premature to take a decision to that effect in the

immediate future. I therefore propose, after consulting with the Secretary-General elect, to adopt something close to Mr. Chrétien's option (c) as an interim measure. This would involve sending a Special Envoy of senior rank to the region, to interested capitals outside the region and to the headquarters of OAU at regular intervals. The Special Envoy's principal function would be to confirm, to the satisfaction of the Secretary-General, that the option of appointing a resident Special Representative was still welcomed in the region, and would be assured sufficient support outside it, for that option to be a viable one. In addition to this exploratory mandate, the Special Envoy would also perform, to the extent possible, the kind of good offices, mobilization and coordination functions which I envisage for a resident Special Representative, as well as advising the Secretary-General on the future of United Nations technical assistance to the electoral process in Zaire.

19. It would be essential for the Special Envoy to be able to travel quickly and at ease in the region and to neighbouring parts of Africa. He or she too would therefore need adequate logistic support, as well as the necessary staff, and I would recommend that this option be proceeded with only if such support was assured.

20. Finally, it would be desirable for the Special Envoy to make his or her first visit to the region as early as possible in the New Year.